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Professor Folwell: As a member of the Economic Association and a resident of a State which has possessed large pine forests, I want to warn all the ladies and gentlemen who are here present that the passage of a law by Congress will not accomplish the work. If any of the gentlemen are acquainted with the power and resources of pine-land rings, you will understand what I mean. It will take years of fighting to beat these rings. They are the smartest men in the country, they will employ the best of counsel, and they have an experience in circumventing the government which will be of the greatest use to them.

THE CONDITION OF THE FORESTS ON THE PUBLIC LANDS
OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY EDWARD A. BOWERS, ESQ.

It is necessary to recognize at the outset that little improvement need be expected in the condition of the public forests of our country, until there is a radical change in the laws relating to them. These forests are steadily being destroyed and injured to such an extent that their preservation even now, to some minds, is problematical. The text of this article is—*The laws Provide neither an adequate method for the Protection of the Public Timber, nor for its Disposition in Regions where its Proper Use is Imperative.*

Aside from the relatively unimportant timber areas of the South, the present forest lands of the United States are situated either high up on the sides of the

great mountain chains that form the backbone of the continent, or along the slopes of the northern half of our Pacific coast. These two regions differ widely—the first being arid, generally mineral, with inferior timber for lumbering, but with a forest cover invaluable for the irrigation now so extensively practiced on the lower lands, subject to dangerous forest fires, owing to the aridity of the region, and consequently a region unfavorable to reforestation by natural methods—the second, famous for its great rainfall and the enormous products of its forests, which are perhaps the finest for lumbering in the world, protected from fires by this heavy rainfall, with soil of little value either for agriculture or mining, and naturally producing a renewal of the forest. In the first region the timber is cut and used locally, and is a prime necessity, while in the second it is cut for export principally. Thus we see that where our Public Forests are most needed, both for the actual forest products and for climatic and agricultural reasons, they are most likely to be destroyed and most difficult to renew.

In the arid mountain regions the great problem is the prevention and control of forest fires, but proper legislation would lessen this source of loss, both by removing some incentives for firing the forests which the present laws and regulations hold out, and by reducing their destructiveness to a minimum. The present annual loss to the Government is placed at \$8,000,000, in the value of wood material alone destroyed, without considering the far more serious secondary and resultant losses from floods, drouth and the destruction of soil fertility and young forest growth.

The foundation of our protective system is the Act of March 1st, 1817, and its amendment in 1832, under which the Secretary of the Navy was to preserve and protect lands of the United States producing live oak and red cedar for the purpose of supplying ship timber for our navy. Upon this old law, having the construction of a *wooden* navy in view, the officers of the Government have to-day chiefly to rely in protecting the timber throughout the arid regions of the West, where not a stick of this naval timber is to be found! An examination of the Statutes shows that there is no legal method by which the great mass of the population, from the Missouri River to Nevada and the Pacific States, can cut public timber. Such timber may be cut on *Mineral* lands by *bona-fide* residents, but as not one acre in thousands is known to be mineral this means comparatively little. All railroads having land grants or rights of way from the Federal Government have the privilege of cutting timber from the public lands adjacent to the line of the road for construction purposes only, to which the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad adds the right of cutting for repairs.

The Timber Culture Act, designed to stimulate the planting of small areas of trees upon the open plains, is the only legislation aiming to promote the extension of forests, and under it less than 50,000 acres of the 38,000,000 acres of public lands entered have been successfully covered with young tree plantations.

The effect of existing legislation is to force the whole population over large areas to steal the timber, which is as necessary for their use as settlers and pioneers as the water that runs in the streams by

them. This has so demoralized this community that convictions for theft of timber, or verdicts for damages for the Government are rare. The few special timber agents, appointed for political reasons and without knowledge or fitness for the work, are regarded as mere spies, and this places the local population in opposition to the Government in its efforts at forest preservation. Moreover, the task laid out for them is manifestly an impossible one. For these twenty-five men can hardly be expected to protect 70,000,000 acres of public forest, collecting the testimony on which suits for trespass and criminal prosecutions for timber depredations may be brought. During the last fiscal year timber depredations to the value of \$3,000,000 on Government lands were reported, and \$100,940.32 is the magnificent sum recovered.

This condition of affairs is not the fault of the officers of the Interior Department or the General Land Office having charge of these lands, but of Congress, which persistently ignores the calls of these officers for such a change in the laws as will enable them to protect the public timber. While this is so, it is the duty of this Association to agitate this question until reform is accomplished.